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Dianne Wampler 08/01/2007 09:45:02 PM From DB/Inbox: Dianne Wampler

Cable
Text:

UNCLAS ISTANBUL 00694

SIPDIS
CX:

ACTION: POL
INFO: CONS TSR PMA ECON DCM AMB RAO FCS PA MGT DAO

DISSEMINATION: POL /1
CHARGE: PROG

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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 010621Z AUG 07
FM AMCONSUL ISTANBUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7353
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: \$50 AND A FREE LUNCH: THE PERKS OF HELPING RUN A
TURKISH ELECTION

¶1. (U) Summary. Unlike most voters, who were in and out of their polling places in five minutes, the Consulate bank teller spent all day at his polling station, helping to administer the official voting. His experience gives a glimpse of civil society's contribution to Turkey's parliamentary elections. End Summary.

¶2. (U) While the majority of the officials selected by the Supreme Election Board (SEB) are teachers and other civil servants, the government also asked large private companies to help. Fortis Bank selected our teller, who received the equivalent of \$50, a free lunch, and the following day off as compensation. He and other lucky winners were given two or three briefing sessions before arriving at their polling stations, generally a school. Under the supervision of a senior official (in his case this was a teacher who had monitored previous elections), he was assigned to a particular ballot box intended to be used by no more than 400 voters. Each polling place had anywhere from five to twenty boxes.

¶3. (U) After voting themselves when they arrived at 7:30am, the monitors were expected to remain at their stations all day, checking identification, distributing ballots and envelopes, and making sure that each voter went into the voting booth alone. Even those assisting older voters were prohibited from entering the booth. Each political party was allowed to have an official observer on hand, but many of them chose not to send representatives. A Consulate FSN noted representatives from the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Republican People's Party (CHP) at his polling place in Istanbul's third district. Other parties were allowed to come and go throughout the day, and when AKP opted not to provide lunch for the officials at the teller's station, Saadet Party volunteered.

¶4. (U) In spite of an 86% turnout rate at the teller's ballot box (260 of the 301 registered voters came), it was rarely busy. Even during the morning peak there were never more than four people waiting in line. Although the polls closed at 5:00pm, the monitors were there counting the votes until 9:00pm. The teller's tabulation was complete by 6:00pm, but official procedures required monitors to wait until all of the boxes from the site were counted before they could leave.

¶5. (U) SEB officials helped record the votes during the counting process. Each envelope was opened and the ballot was held up for everyone in the room to see. Two officials then separately recorded each vote on papers previously printed with each party's name, so that they could check the accuracy of their recordings. The vote count was entered into a computer provided by the SEB and then the ballots were sealed in bags and transported by bus to the district's Election Board Center where they remained until the results are finalized on July 30.

¶6. (U) Voting is compulsory in Turkey but serving as a polling official is not. Our teller,s willingness to do so, along with others like him, help explain the rapid vote tally on election night despite 84% turnout (42 million votes) and Turkey,s reputation for fair, well-organized elections.
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